

1342.K.32.
M E R O P E

A
T R A G E D Y

BY THE
MARQUIS SCIPIO MAFFEI.

Translated from the
ORIGINAL ITALIAN,
By Mr. A T R E.



L O N D O N :

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P R E F A C E.

THE noble author of *Merope* address'd it to the duke of Modena, then reigning, in whose state and presence it was first acted. It is not my intention to give the reader the whole of that dedication, but only to extract such passages out of it as immediately relate to the tragedy.

After having declar'd the persons in the drama must speak for themselves; I shall content myself (says the marquis, writing to that prince) with only hinting, what foundation of authority the facts suppos'd or represented in this tragedy may have. That sometime after the taking of Troy, the Eraclici, that is to say, the Descendants of Hercules, made themselves masters of Messene, that by lots which were cast, this province fell to Cresfonte: that *Merope* was his wife, and that he being inclin'd to favour the commonality, was slain by the nobles, with his children,

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children, except the youngest, who prov'd exceeding brave, and revenged the death of his father, we have from Pausanias. That Cresfonte being murder'd with his two sons, Polifonte govern'd the Kingdom, born also from the Eraclidi, that he forc'd Merope to become his wife; and that the third son, conceal'd by his mother, slew the tyrant and recover'd the kingdom, we have from Apollodorus. That an old man made Merope sensible it was her son, when she was about to kill him, and that the young man slew Polifonte at the sacrifice, we have from Iginus.

But perhaps your most serene highness may begin to wonder, that I have made no mention of Euripides, of whom, on this point, it is almost impossible to omit speaking.

It is well known, that great poet upon this subject compos'd the most famous of his tragedies, which, to the great loss of the theatre, was never handed down to posterity. Aristotle speaks of it, where treating of the manner of composing the fable well, he gives Cresfonte of Euripides for example the best, and some thought that my intentions were to follow that as near as possible. On the contrary, in the texture of mine, I have sought to leave it as far as I could, as well to write a new tragedy, as not think-

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thinking myself forbid to attempt something further. Your highness might here ask me, what certainty I can possibly have that I have varied from it: and seeing that so many poets have in vain guess'd, in what manner Euripides conducted this plot, how can I now pretend to have discovered it? To which I shall reply, that I imagine to have made this discovery, in the reading the 184th fable of Iginus, which to my judgment is nothing else than the argument of that tragedy, in which the conducting of the plot is wholly represented. I remember when I first read that author, it struck suddenly into my mind, that most of his fables were no other than the arguments of the ancient tragedies: I was more fully convinc'd of this by confronting some few of them with the tragedies we have still left us; and the last edition of that book coming lately to my hands, I was exceedingly pleas'd to see it asserted there, that Reinesius was of the same sentiment.

John Battista Liviera, who printed a tragedy upon this subject in the year 1588, took the story essentially from Iginus. The count Pomponio Torelli, who publish'd another in 1598, followed the same tract: so that these poets did in part renew Euripides without being sensible of it. Their tragedies, notwithstanding they were praise-worthy, made me think much more might be pro-

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produc'd on so great a subject: whence I sought to conduct myself by a quite different path, and to paint a mother which never enter'd into their minds.

So that it not being my intention to follow the tragedy of Euripides, I consequently have not aim'd to put into mine the sentiments of his, which remain here, and there, scatter'd; Cicero having translated five verses, and Plutarch quoted three passages, Gellius two verses, and some others, if my memory deceive me not, are found in Stobeus. But not on this account have I alter'd certain principal points of tradition, such as the killing Polifonte at the sacrifice, the rage of the mother against her unknown son, &c. I should have made a scruple not to have retain'd them exactly, seeing Plutarch bears witness what an effect they had in ancient times upon the spectators in these words.

*“ Consider that Merope who with an ax lifted
“ up, stands ready to kill her own son, which she
“ believes to have murder'd him, and says, with
“ this blow will I give thee death.*

*“ What a commotion does it not excite in the
“ theatre, every one standing intent, and fear-
“ ing that the old man might not prevent her,
“ and she should wound the youth her son?*

But

P R E F A C E.

But fearing I intrude too much upon the clemency of your highness, I shall conclude what I have to say, with only this addition, that whatever fortune this piece may encounter, which I don't know whether I ought to call my labour or recreation, I shall esteem myself sufficiently happy as it has lent me an opportunity of shewing my veneration for so excellent a Prince.



CHA-



CHARACTERS.

POLIFONTE,

MEROPE,

EGISTUS,

ADRASTUS,

EURISO,

ISMENA,

POLIDORE.

AND

ME



MEROPE.

TRAGEDY.



ACT I.

SCENE I.

Polifonte, Merope: Ismena waiting at a distance.

Polifonte.

AT length, O Merope, drive from thy breast
Long grief, hate, and distrust; a better fate
I now pronounce thee, or I rather bring.
What from another thou wouldst scarce believe,
Believe from me, who never speak in vain.
Thee, for my royal consort, I've elected;
That our Messenia once more may behold
Thee its great queen; then put off mourning robes,
Put off those veils, and all this widow's weed,
And reassume rich gems, and cheerful dress;
In present good, as thou art wise, at last

B

Speak

Speak comfort to thy troubled thoughts again,
And scatter old misfortunes in oblivion.

Mer. Heaven ! what new sort of torment do I see
Now making ready for me ! Polifonte,
Leave me in peace ; even in that bitter peace
Which in continual tears th' unhappy find.
Leave me a prey to my long-suffer'd sorrow.

Pol. See, if it be not true, that women make
Themselves a false ambition of their tears !
Neglected then, abandon'd, and almost
A prisoner, is it better thou remain,
Than to regain a kingdom ?

Mer. Not a kingdom
Could compensate the grief of being thine.
Ought I be join'd to him, who in my bosom
(Bitter remembrance !) murder'd my lov'd hus-
Cruelly murder'd him ? or on his lips (band ?
Ought I to wanton, who my children butcher'd ?
Thoughts of it make me tremble, and I feel
Cold horror chill my blood in every vein.

Pol. How canst thou ever keep fix'd in thy mind
Things finish'd quite, and of so old a date
I scarce remember them ! but I intreat thee,
Give place to reason : tell me, was it just
That always o'er Messenia thy Cresfonte
Alone should reign, and I not less than he
Born from th' Eraclidi, should waste my life,
Mix'd and confus'd among the vulgar herd ?
Further thou know'st, he was not well accepted
And that not only foreign help, and arms,
But in the field to my assistance came
The first and greatest of the realm : and lastly,
What leads to power always gains applause.
For if to govern, if to throw off servitude,
Lawful was not to man, were he forbid
To put in use his wisdom, and his valour,
Jove would have given him those great gifts in vain.

Mer.

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Men. Barbarous reasoning ! all the right, the claim,
 To govern in Messenia was Cresfonte's ;
 Was his by lot from heaven, and choice on earth :
 Go ask of others, if he govern'd well,
 Ask this afflicted people, they who mourn
 Incessantly his loss ; they prov'd him good,
 As good to them a king, as me an husband.
 Ah ! who like me was happy in that day ?
 And such I should be now, hadst thou not been.
 Raging ambition urg'd thee, and blind envy
 Encompass'd thee about ; and what, o heaven !
 What cruelty unheard of that of thine !
 At first when the conspiracy broke out,
 My harmless infant sons, ah ! my dear children !
 Who might with their blest looks, and with their
 Humbly address'd for mercy, lifting up (prayers
 Their little tender hands and weeping eyes,
 Might have mov'd pity in wild beasts and stones,
 Thou with thy own hand didst kill ! and all the
 That we held I come to our defence, (time
 What slaughter of our friends didst thou make ? *not*
 Here in Messene make ? and when at last
 Ourselves surrender'd, why, against all faith
 Gav'st thou my husband death ? o treachery !
 From such a monster, have I now to hear
 Discourse of nuptials, and intreats of love ?
 Am I reserv'd to this too ? heavenly powers !

Pol. At last be pacified ; thou being woman,
 Hast as a woman reason'd : those soft passions,
 And all that tenderness in thee I blame not ;
 Yet they become not high aspiring minds.
 But tell me, why alone what gives displeasure
 Thy mind goes searching after, and omits
 How much I've done for thee ? and not remembers
 That the third son, in whom the father's name
 It pleas'd thee to renew, thou keep'st conceal'd ;
 And I permitted it, the false report

By thee spread of his death, I seem'd to credit,
And in thy favour let it pass in silence.

Mer. My young Cresfonte, who, as then with me,
Had not arriv'd to his third year, expir'd
Too certain in these arms, in the first days
Of the tumult; the poor little tender babe,
He could not bear the hardships of the flight,
What speak'st thou? or to whom dost thou relate
To have shewn for him an heart so full of clemency?
Perhaps thou hast not search'd Argos, and Corinth,
Arcadia, Sparta, Pifa, and, in fine,
The Earth and Sea, for this thy vain suspicion?
Even to this day, urg'd by this impious care,
Are there not those of thine, who hourly watch?
In various parts? ah! now is plainly seen
Death, if not sanguine, does not satiate tyrants:
Thou griev'st that Nature step'd before the steel,
And rob'd thee the fierce pleasure of the stroke.

Pol. That he di'd not is in Messenia known,
And still he lives, but thou deny'st it all:
Wilt thou deny thyself to be alive?
Wilt thou deny but that thou ow'st it to me?
Was not thy life in my hands, as well as others?

Mer. Behold the gift of tyrants: they esteem
Not giving death to others, they give life.

Pol. But leave we all like this; now let us leave
Remembrance of all past, all painful things:
Thou of my love, for, Merope, I love thee,
Seest proofs which cannot lie, what I took from thee
At once see I restore, a spouse, a kingdom,
And children, if my hopes prove not in vain:
Will it not more than make thy heart amends
For ancient faults?

Mer. Ah! tell me, Polifonte,
How is this love so late born in thy breast?
Desires of me, why did not they excite thee

Than

Then when gay youth sat blooming in my face ?
 But now to urge thee, when my age declines,
 When leaving all my better days behind,
 I count near forty summers ? P. Merope,
 What now I covet, ever was my wish ;
 But the hard tenor of my life, to thee
 Is fully known. Thou knowst I scarce was king,
 When foreign wars infest me, one extinct,
 Another kindles, and without repose,
 Ten years, from place to place, I sweat in arms.
 At length my foreign foes left me in peace,
 But then the sturdy rabble of Messenia
 Began to stir commotions in the state :
 In all these heavy cares my soft desires
 Were kept in silence. Now at last in calm
 I see this kingdom, and all pleasing thoughts
 Feel wake within me, age now coming on
 I'll fence with children ; love, till now suppress'd,
 I will that it be satisfied.

Mer. What love ?

They who advance in power above the rest,
 Presume the same in knowledge, and believe
 To draw to their conceits the minds of others.
 Thinkst thou that Merope is so unwise
 That the great secret, and the hidden drift
 She sees not at the full ? the last great tumult
 Shew'd thee too plain ; thou wert not yet secure
 In thy ill-gotten throne, and none of thine :
 Thou canst discern how recent, and how dear,
 Is still the memory of the good Cresfonte.
 And now thy few, but crafty, friends give hope,
 That if thou wed me, and I reign with thee,
 Hate will diminish, and at last the people
 May suffer the hard yoke. This is the love
 Inflames thee now for me ; these the sweet thoughts
 That wake within thee.

Pol.

Pol. Never did I see
 Than thee more ready to turn all to ill.
 So firmly am I seated in my throne,
 Of others favours I make no account;
 They who, in vain, gnash at me, them I laugh at,
 And laugh shall always. But allow it so,
 Were it as thou hast dream'd: yet this is certain,
 Thy good is here included. Now make use
 Of all thy wisdom, and embrace thy lot.
 Give thought to nothing else: 'tis best for thee
 Promptly to seize the effect, not list the cause.

Mer. Yes, if I had a Polifonte's heart,
 Or if I could to a vain blast of fame,
 An idol of a kingdom, sacrifice
 Faith, kill affection; or, if I had power
 Ever to extinguish, tho' I had the will;
 Just and insuperable hate.

Pol. Debate
 Here we break off, repulse there should be none!
 Against full power: dispose thee for these nuptials,
 And hasten to obey, please thee or not,
 I will it so.——Adrastus here! approach.

SCENE II.

To them. Ismena, &c. Adrastus.

Mer. Ismena, never more leave me alone.

Adr. Sir, I'm this moment come.

Ism. I did not dare,
 Perceiving high discourse, to draw too nigh.
 But, O my queen! why do I see her thus?
 Disorder'd thus?

Mer. Thou shortly shalt know all.

Pol. Adrastus, tell what is it brings thee to us?

Adr. I've brought a murd'rer hither to Messene,
 That so his punishment may purge away
 All unpropitious omens, and prevent

Else.

Elsewhere his roving with the beast to have broke
And set at nought our laws.

Pol. Who is this man?

Adr. Not of this country; he's a traveller.

Pol. And who the man that's kill'd?

Adr. Nor know I that, O

His body being thrown into the river,

That now swells high, and foaming as it flows:

Nor was I present at the fact, but that

The guilty wretch does not deny. 'Twas where

My orders always fix me, to keep guard

With squadrons of the infantry, arriv'd

News that, not far from thence, upon the bridge,

A man that instant had been robb'd and murder'd.

The robber, he, 'twas said, had taken his way

Along the river. I, who, as it happen'd,

Was in my saddle, spur'd and overtook him.

Some things, which he denies not to have taken,

Convinc'd me nothing drew him to shed blood

But greediness of rapine. To conclude,

If you give faith to looks, this is not true.

A youth of high conceptions in low state,

And in Plebeian garb, a noble aspect.

Pol. Bring him before me. *Ex. Adr.*

Mer. *Apart to Ism.* Here, the spilling blood,

Where reigns a murderer, he may think no crime.

Ismena apart. Certain if every death, if every rapine,

By Polifonte had been paid with punishment,

This land affords not every one an axe.

SCENE III.

Adrastus to them with Egistius.

Adr. Behold the guilty man.

Mer. A gentle aspect.

Pol. In age so green, so wicked! who art thou?

Whence art? and whither didst thou think to go?

Eg. The poor and obscure son of a poor father:

I come

I come from Elis, and was going to Sparta.

Ismena apart to Merope.

What ails my queen? what sudden tears I see

Run trickling from her eyes?

Merope apart to Ismena.

O my Ismena!

When this young man address'd himself to speak,

He made a certain motion with his lips

That to my mind brought my lov'd husband back,

Pictur'd him to me just as if I'd seen him.

Pol. What? didst thou think that in this realm to
thieves,

And common stabbers, was permission given

To deal their cruel fury out at pleasure?

Or didst thou think no judge supreme was here?

Or that I hold the government in vain?

Eg. That I thought not, nor yet what I have done,

Was I urg'd by greediness of gain,

Or impious thirst of blood. I was constrain'd

To take his life in my own just defence,

Who otherways had robb'd and murder'd me.

I call in testimony that great Jove,

Who in Olympus, but a few days since,

In his great temple I ador'd. My journey

I prosecuted, silent, and alone,

When from the way that toward Laconia leads,

A man comes forward, much like me in age,

But of a fierce and savage aspect; he

Held in his hand a knotty club, and fix'd

Sternly his eyes on me, then looking round,

To see if company came here or there;

At length he seiz'd my arm, when we arriv'd

Just at the entrance of the marble bridge,

Demanding my apparel, and what else

I carried with me, threat'ning instant death.

Undaunted, I by force got loose my arm,

When lifting up his club with both his hands,

Quick

Quick he made ready for me such a blow,
 As had it reach'd me, it had left my brains
 Scatter'd a prey to the rapacious vultures;
 But swiftly passing under, I flew on him,
 And grasping of him traverse, wrestled with him:
 We struggled for a while, till both together
 Came to the ground, and was it art, or chance,
 I had him under me, and he his head
 Struck so against a stone, that all his face
 At once grew pallid, and his loosen'd joints
 Lay without motion. Then I quickly thought
 A spectacle so shocking in the road,
 Would raise pursuit from every part upon me:
 So that I took the dead, or the half living;
 And not without fatigue, (for he was heavy)
 Lifted him from the earth, and on the earth
 Were puddles of his blood: In haste I bore him
 To the middle of the bridge, and all the way
 A streak vermillion bloody mark'd the ground;
 From thence I push'd him headlong: down he
 plung'd,
 Loud dashing in the stream, the frothy spray
 Rose at his fall, and the waves cover'd him.
 No more I saw him, for the rapid torrent
 Has bore him to some whirlpool, and engulf'd him.
 His Club lay by him, that, and some black skin
 He wore, which in the struggle I tore from him,
 With me I bore away, not as a rapine,
 But for my pleasure to reserve as trophies:
 For who can ever think that spoils like these
 Almost of none, or of so little price,
 Should urge me to a risque of so much danger,
 And make me kill another?

Adr. 'Tis a rule,
 The cause of him is good who speaks alone.

Pol. In vain he colours and adorns a tale,
Thus in his favour, seeing none to oppose,
Since I, the guardian of the offended laws,
Shall be his adversary.

Mer. Polifonte,
Be not so hastily severe : suspend
Till other proofs confront him, for I see
Of truth signs not a few ; to me he seems
Worthy of pity.

Pol. Nothing to thee to day
Must be denied : but let it please thee now
Return to thy apartment, for thy stay,
If lengthen'd, breaks too much upon decorum.

Ism. aside] Not for an hour, no ; not for a moment,
Can wicked kings abandon their suspicion.

Pol. Adraustus, let it be mean time thy care
That he escape us not. [Exit.

Mer. And, o Adraustus,
Towards that miserable youth use pity :
Tho' he be poor, tho' he be born to serve,
At last he is a man, and very soon
Begins to feel the sorrows of this Life.

Aside to Ism.] In such low state, alas ! my Son
lies hid ;

Thou mayst believe, Ismena, that if he
Might here arrive in this so distant place,
I should behold him such ; and that his dress
Would not be much unlike. Grant me good heav'n,
That he be form'd as well, and that his limbs
Have such a just proportion.

SCENE

S C E N E IV.

Egistus and Adrastus.

I intreat thee

Inform me, who is this?

Adr. Queen of this realm

She once has been, and once again will be.

Eg. O may the powerful Gods exalt her always,

And hourly give her mercy, that reward

Which I have not to give. Never did I

Behold a woman yet, who had the power,

Such reverence in the breast, and love to move.

And thou, who near the king, canst do so much,

Follow her great example, and incline

To do me favour; have compassion on me,

Who in the flower of age, without defence,

Without the smallest guilt, by adverse fate,

Am fal'n into such peril, do not cause

In this so famous city, that my blood

Be spilt in wrong; a lasting torment that

To both my innocent afflicted parents,

To whom, alone, my absence now is cause

That they consume themselves in grief.

Adr. At first

I represented all to thy advantage:

Perhaps thou hast forgot the Courtesy

I shew'd in thy behalf? and yet thou seest

How I kept silence of the costly ring,

Which thou hadst stol'n, and I took from thy hand:

What dost thou think induc'd me to conceal it?

The mean desire of having in possession

That jewel? or to give it to the king?

How ill hast thou believ'd if thou thought'st so!

To me no gems are wanting. But I did it

For thy escape, without another motive:

Had I discover'd such a theft as this,

Of such a price, thy guilt had been too plain,
 Nay aggravated much, for it appears
 Some man of high degree by thee was kill'd.

Eg. Thou seem'st fix'd to believe, that I have stol'n
 That graven stone ; but I attest again,
 A gift I had it from my ancient father.
 Believe this, know, that I'm not us'd to lie.

Adr. Rather I see thou knowst not how to lie.
 Didst thou not tell me, that thy father lay
 In servile fortune low ?

Eg. I said, and say it.

Adr. Now then, have servants in thy country gems
 Of this degree ? an happy country thine :
 In ours that jewel would not misbecome
 A royal finger.

Eg. That I cannot speak to,
 Nor know I of its price : but this I swear,
 That not a great while since, just on the day
 My eighteenth year compleatly fill'd its course,
 Before our altar of domestick Gods,
 My father call'd me : shedding tender tears,
 He put that very ring upon my finger,
 And made me vow, that I'd be careful of it.
 Jove hears my words, and if they are not truths,
 May he hurl his avenging flame this moment,
 And scorch me up to ashes.

Adr. Oaths are weapons
 That may do much, and us'd at proper times,
 Give lucky hits; but thou art yet to learn,
 With me they gain no ground. Leave we these
 tales :

The point is this, I for thy good alone
 Shall make no mention of it to the king ;
 Thou, on the other hand, wouldst thou be safe,
 Conceal it from all others.

Eg.

Eg. So much I promise,
And thou think as thou wilt, if thou assist me
Out of this peril, lead me into safety,
I make thee of that ring an hearty gift.

Adr. A gracious gift is this, when thou hast giv'n
What is in my own power, and mine already.

End of the First Act.

4 AP 54



ACT



A C T II.

S C E N E I.

Euriso and Ismena.

Is. Euriso, no ; now to see Merope
 Is not the time : tho' thou alone art he
 To whom her secret thoughts she dares im-
 Leave her yet to herself, that so with tears (part,
 Passion may find a little vent : thou knowst not
 What new misfortune presses her at heart.

Eur. From an ambiguous, tho' a spreading voice,
 But now I've understood that Polifonte
 Hastens the threaten'd nuptials ; this brought me
 To know the truth from her.

Is. A bitter evil
 This she esteems, which yet she scarcely feels,
 But in her breast keeps quiet, for her soul
 With other greater much is overwhelm'd.

Eur. What can it be ? perhaps unlucky news
 About her son, whom she a little infant
 Gave to that good old servant Polidore,
 To bear far hence, and bring him up as his ?

Is. It is as thou hast guess'd : thou knowst full well,
 No other comfort had th'unhappy queen,
 Than sending to Laconia twice a year,
 Faithful Arbantes with a secret charge.
 She counted every hour, and every moment,
 Till his return, almost out of herself,
 An hundred things in one short breath would know,
 And

And ponder long the words came from his mouth,
 Oft changing colour and all over trembling:
 Then turn again to know minutest things,
 Nor did she ever leave, till she had heard
 All her son's actions, words, his shape, his cloaths,
 Told ten times over by the good Arbantes.

Eur. To tell me what I know pain not thyself:
 Merope I know well, she oft has told me
 All this at large, and if she could recount
 Only a single word of her son's good,
 What tears of joy, o heaven, shone in her eyes
 While she rehears'd it! But say thou, what news
 Comes of Cresfonte?

Ism. Arbantes is arriv'd,
 Who staid much longer than his usual time;
 He says Cresfonte is no longer found
 With th' old sorrowful man, who searches round
 For him in vain, and hears no tidings of him.

Eur. O hope cut off, o this afflicted kingdom,
 Race of our kings extinct!

Ism. Thou seemst, to me,
 Another Merope exact, at once
 To throw thee on extremes: I did not say
 His death was brought us.

Eur. But dost thou believe
 That he by chance, or of himself, is vanish'd?
 No, he's at last betray'd to Polifonte,
 Caught in some snare in ambush, he's cut off.

Ism. Nothing of this: But Polidore affirms,
 An eager inclination seiz'd the youth
 To travel up and down in Greece, and see
 Some cities, whose great names had wearied fame.
 Now with intreaties, now paternal power,
 He for a time restrain'd him; till at last,
 His glowing spirit, conquer'd by desire,
 By stealth he went away, and the old man,

Wait-

Waiting a little for him, but in vain,
Was just about to follow, and himself
Put in the track to find his footsteps out.

Eur. This is a lesser ill, perhaps no ill,
What danger in his travels can he meet,
Unknown to every one, and to himself?
On that reflecting, the afflicted mother
Will soon take comfort.

Ism. Yes ; I'll tell thee how :
All the disasters, all the risques that ever
Give molestation to the traveller,
If thou hearst her, crowd all about her son.
The burning sun, the chilly show'rs of rain,
The rugged mountains, she remembers all ;
Not only every dismal chance can happen,
Presents itself before her lab'ring mind :
Now born down by the stream passing some river,
Now among robbers wounded and oppress'd,
She sees him ; but she calls back even her dreams,
And every thing makes matter for complaint :
In sum Euriso, might I speak the truth,
To me sometimes her senses seem to falter.

Eur. O child, the mother's heart excuses all.
That's the affection, where great nature makes
A pomp of her divine and boundless power.
Thy own experience will confirm this truth,

Ism. My own experience never, all the day
I learn what madness 'tis to seek such sorrow.

Eur. But this is grief that we acquire with pleasure.

Ism. For me, believe me fix'd.

Eur. Desir'd and sought,

These thoughts are vain, and war with all thy

Ism. Behold the queen. (charms.

S C E N E

SCENE II.

To them Merope.

Mer. At sight of thee, Euriso,
Again my tears flow their accustom'd way.

Eur. But now I heard the news.

Mer. Quite different this,
From harbouring thoughts, that now my son had
Maturity of years, and manly strength, (reach'd
In the best manner how to make him known :
Quite different this, from figuring to myself
To see him quickly at the people's head,
Fierce vengeance hurling on the cruel tyrant.

Eur. Pardon me, o my queen : and who destroys
These pleasing hopes ? or what the consequence
If laudable desire lead the young prince
A while among the provinces of Greece,
To know, and make a treasure of experience ?
Certain the queen in grief drowns reason.

Mer. Ah !
Thou knowst not by what fear I'm overcome.

Eur. Let the queen speak it.

Mer. Where the two roads meet
That the bridge joins, a man was lately kill'd.

Eur. I know it, for Adrastus took the murtherer.

Mer. Now he that's kill'd I fear (and would to heav'n
That this may be vain fear) I fear, Euriso,
Lest it has been Cresfonte.

Eur. Gods eternal !
Where does my queen go searching every hour
Motives for sorrow !

Mer. Motives much too strong
This time are mine : observe. Here in Messina
No man is missing, whence the unhappy wretch
Is prov'd a traveller : the thief confesses
His age was much like his, that he was poor,

D

Alone,

Alone, and that he came as from Laconia ;
 Dost thou not see how all these Things agree ?
 Besides he bore a Club : perhaps at last
 The good old man might have discover'd to him
 That he was born from Hercules, whence he
 Of arms worn by his Ancestors, might make
 Like youth an ostentation, yes, 'tis certain
 Hither he came, poor youth, to tempt his fate.

Eur. Too little proof for such a great suspicion.

Mer. Further I've thought, the tyrant's favourite,
 Adrastus, brought the Murd'rer. Tell me now,
 Why did he come himself ? without more trouble
 He might have sent him ; and why must the body
 Be made away with, thrown into the river
 That none might see it ?

Eur. To torment thyself

What ways dost thou contrive !

Mer. Alas for me !

Who in my bodings am not us'd to err,
 Didst thou not note Ismena, how much care
 The tyrant took in parting, not to leave me,
 Lest I should come to question with the homicide ?
 Dost thou not call to mind how prompt and glad
 He granted what I ask'd for in his favour ?

Ism. That full of gentleness, and with much clemency
 He then behav'd himself must be allow'd ;
 Something too different from his usual custom.

Eur. But it would help him in a case like this
 More to divulge, than keep the fact conceal'd,
 To cut off all the hopes of those who hate him.

Mer. Not yet, lest this new piece of cruelty
 Should animate too much the popular rage.

Eur. But how wilt thou, that now so unexpected
 He may have found thy son ?

Mer. Of tyrants who
 Can penetrate the hidden ways ? perhaps
 The wicked thief murder'd him but to rob

And

And after was discover'd.

Eur. From this labyrinth,
Which thou hast made up for thyself, I hope
Shortly to lead thee out. In little time
Adrastus will be in great necessity
Of my assistance ; that I can with-hold
If I should find him backward to oblige me :
Let me confer with him, and, o my queen,
From him I promise to draw forth enough
To resolve all.

Mer. The very best of counsel,
Is what thou giv'st me ; put it into Action
Quickly, nor let delay step in between.

Eur. Doubt not, my queen ; but in so many ills
Ah ! do not thou thyself take part with fate,
Let not thy mind create thee more misfortunes.

Mer. O my Euriso, now I plainly see
That this is nothing more than my suspicion ;
Allow it to be false, yet canst thou think
Barely to know that my Cresfonte wanders
Will suffer me to harbour thoughts of Joy ?
Alone, an unexperienc'd, homely youth,
And unappriz'd of ways, customs, and dangers,
Who has no place of rest, poor, and without
All hospitable succour, what for food
And where to lay his head, will he not suffer ?
What want ? how often to a stranger's table
Shall he approach ? and humbly asking bread,
Perhaps be driven away ; he, whose great father
Spread his rich table for such numbers. Then
Should he fall sick, as that he may too easy,
Whose care will he then be ? low on the ground
When he shall languid lay, afflicted, left,
A draught of water, none shall hand it to him.
O Gods, might I at least but travel with him,
I think that I should suffer all in peace.

Ism. Hark ! there is trampling, Polifonte comes.

Mer. Then I withdraw ; make it thy care Euriso
To seek Adrastus.

Eur. Now he's with the king :
The minute they two part, with him I'll close,
Explore the whole, and then return to thee. [*Ex.*]

S C E N E III.

Polifonte and Adrastus.

Pol. Now tell me, dost thou think, that this proud
Hourly unquiet, this tumultuous mob, (city)
Will ever lay aside their rebel thoughts ?

Adr. The vile low rabble, who can fall no lower,
Always abhor the present, and love change.

Pol. Too great a truth ; and where'soe'er I pass,
I see their faces painted with pale rancour,
And read in every forehead open treason.

Adr. Hasten o king, for these thy nuptials ; hasten
With this vain imag'ry of peace and justice
To please this mad and discontented people.

Pol. To take revenge upon them would be better.

Adr. Thou thy own kingdom wouldst thyself destroy.

Pol. My kingdom empty I should be secure.

Adr. Shouldst thou desire, there's no room to hope it.

Pol. Dost thou believe that only to behold
Merope compass'd round with royal honour
Could have such great effect upon the people ?

Adr. Th' uncertain voice alone, that of it runs
Already to not few has reconcil'd thee ;
And there are those who hope, Cresfonte's wife
May raise in thee a likeness of Cresfonte.

Pol. An idle thought ! But what if she refuse !

Adr. Women, thou know'st, what they refuse, desire.

Pol. Ill by a common rule thou measur'st her.

Adr. Care must be taken by some proper Action
Grateful to her, to appease her angry mind ;

There

There's nothing difficult but the first step.
This done, and she reduc'd, tho' with repugnance,
And half consenting, but to bear the name
Of wife to thee, 'twill be an easy task
To conquer all her heart ; nuptial caresses
Have sovereign Virtues ; soon do they appease
Anger in woman, and acquire her love.
Perhaps with blandishments, and soothing arts
(The strongest trial of a feminine mind)
Thou from her lips at last might'st come to draw
The important secret, where she hides her son,
For Peace while he has life thou can'st not have.

Pol. This is the thorn that keeps fix'd in my heart.

Adr. All this might happen ; but if she persist
Contemptuous, and superb in her own wrong,
If she refuse to yield, then threats, and force,
Must be made use of ; for at any price
Must be obtain'd her crowning in the temple
In the eyes of all Messenia, and in pomp
Of joyous hymeneals, she, for whom
Is bore such pity, and such strong affection,
Thus giving peace and honour to what's left
Of that great family to them so dear.

Pol. Adrastus, truth prevails, thou reason'st well,
Ismena order to be call'd. My thoughts
Conform to thine : nor let us stand at bay.
'Tis ill delaying, what is good to do.
Hence go thou to the priest, bid him prepare
For solemn and glad sacrifice to-morrow.
(The foolish vulgar will in every thing
Drag in the Gods.) Then pass thro' all the streets
And spread the news with art, and in my favour.

Adr. Thy wife resolves I hasten to obey.

S C E N E

S C E N E I V.

*Ismena, Polifonte.**Ism.* What is the king's command?*Pol.* Speak thus to Merope,

Tell her my love admits of no delay,
 Tell her I will not multiply the loss
 Of so much wasted Age. At rising sun
 Therefore we'll go to the temple, where the Gods
 Of my true heart, of my perpetual faith
 I'll make my sureties. Thence shall she go forth
 At the enlivening the glad trumpet's sound,
 Amidst the general joy, and chearful shouts
 A wife and queen. Whatever hand presents
 A gift like that, it ought to buy esteem.

If. O royal sir, 'twas but this day, since noon

Thou madst thy firm determination known.

To such a great and sudden change wilt thou

Pol. I will that what I've said be all accomplish'd

To-morrow, e'er high noon: it merits praise

Afflictions to protract, not benefits.

And now that Merope may plainly see

How absolutely in my heart she reigns,

Tell her that I perceiving her desire

About the murd'rer, give my royal word

That no decree of mine shall rise against him.

Hereafter she may ever rest assur'd

In vain the laws shall clamour and cry out

'Gainst those whom her high favour shall absolve.

Go, and intreat, in such a chearful day

She lighten up with joy her pensive looks,

And cloath herself with all becoming pomp.

If. A fever which she feeds when others sleep

And strives in vain to keep conceal'd, assaults her,

And has for some time past. Grant her, o king,

Yet a few days to gather health and spirit.

Pol.

Pol. Thou hast heard what I command, and now thy
Is to obey, not babble to the wind.

(duty)

[*Exeunt.*]

S C E N E V.

Ismena, afterward Merope.

If. O wretched queen! to fill the measure up
Of all thy sorrows only this was wanting;
Time opportune indeed! unhappy she!
For to see herself led on to nuptials,
Nuptials with Polifonte: o hard fate!

Mer. Ismena, what was Polifonte's will?

If. He wills that the next sun sees thee his bride.

Mer. Thoughts of Cresfonte weigh me down so much,
This other burden I'd almost forgot:
But what of that? Death at my pleasure waits
To lighten me of this, could I but know
Ought certain of my son, or that he lives.

If. Further he added, seeing thy favour towards him
For that alone the murtherer should not die.

Mer. Now see Ismena, is the secret here?

What care to second with a mind so ready
A flash of faint desire that shone in me?

If. Behold Euriso comes, with brow serene, (tidings)
And smiles, that speak like one who brings glad

S C E N E VI.

To them Euriso.

Now heav'n be prais'd, o queen; this once how
From trouble I shall set thee free: o thus (ever
Might I but one day free thee from all others.

Mer. Euriso thou hast cheer'd me, but what news
Bringst

her,
ing,

Pol.

Bringst thou so certain?

Eur. Scarcely with Adrastus

Had I began to speak, when it was clear,
The man slain by the robber at the bridge
Was not thy son.

Mer. All thanks be to the Gods,
From death thou hast turn'd me back to life ; and
Suspicion grew upon me : but of this (yet
Which are the proofs to thee so very clear?

Eur. I need but mention one : thou sayst Cresfonte,
Brought up beneath an humble roof, appear'd
But as the son of a servant, wandering now
In mean apparel.

Mer. 'Tis indeed too true.

Eur. Know then that this unfortunate had with him
Rich spoils, and costly garments.

Mer. If this be,
He could not be Cresfonte, thou hast reason.

But the spoils what were they ? where are they ?

Eur. Of them

This gem alone I wouldst that thou mightst see :
Adrastus ventur'd it into my hands,
But not without some difficulty ; see
If 'tis not worth a treasure.

Mer. O Euriso,

To thee how much I'm bound !—fails not my
eye-sight ?

Help me ye Gods, that I die not this instant.

If. What can it be ?

Eur. I can't so much as think.

Mer. Ah ! no, I do not err : 'tis it. Had he,
He that was murder'd, then, this gem ?

Eur. He had ;

Now what afflicts thee ?

Mer. Yes, ye adverse stars,

Yes, ye have conquer'd ; now, o Destiny,

Thy latest blow of all is struck. Ah me !

Eur.

Eur. I'm all confusion.

Ism. My heart beats and trembles.

Mer. This is the ring, which I to Polidore
Gave with the child, and with it a command
To give it to my son, should he arrive
To man's estate ; and that, alas ! he is,
But all in vain.

Eur. Alas ! what do I hear ?

Ism. O wonder big with horror !

Mer. I a mother
Am now no longer ; every hope is fal'n.

Ism. Perhaps, alas ! thou hast mistook ; for how,
After so long a time, canst thou retain
The idea of a ring ? can't we suppose
Two gems to have a likeness of each other ?

Mer. What likeness ? what mistake ? five years intire
This gem I carried on my finger : this
Was the first gift of my husband ; and wouldst thou
That I should have forgot it ? dost thou think
I am not sensible ? behold the fox,
The private signet of the king Cresfonte,
Grav'd there by a great master.

Eur. But perhaps
Th' old man might lose it in so many years,
Perhaps it might be stol'n.

Mer. Not so : Arbantes
Always has seen it carefully preserv'd.

Eur. O force of destiny !

Ism. Her heart foretold it.

Eur. None can have such foreboding minds as mothers :

Mer. What do I stay for ? in this bitter life
What now detains me ? for so many years
My nourishment has been a single hope ;
Which now is to the winds ; nothing remains ;
Never shall I behold my son again.
Now Polifonte he shall always reign,
Shall reign in quiet. O ye powers unjust !

The wicked, the perfidious, the traitor,
 Usurper, who in cruelty, in frauds,
 In all impiety, has far outgone,
 All that before had bore the name of bad,
 Him you protect, on him shew'r all your favours;
 Against the blood of the good king Cresfonte,
 Against his innocent children, you are pleas'd
 To level all your darts ; and grieve perhaps
 Now all extinct, no mark remains to hit.

Eur. This sad, unthought-of, dreadful accident
 Has struck me so, and so oppresses me,
 That I myself am more in need of comfort,
 Than apt to comfort others. Yet, o queen,
 Good wishes, and the grief extreme I feel,
 For all thy griefs, occasion me to speak :
 This is the time to call into thy heart
 All the force of thy virtue. Hitherto
 As beyond human course, and far beyond
 The custom of thy sex, thou hast surpass'd
 In every other accident all others,
 So now in bearing up against this stroke
 Shew thyself equal ; let the Gods see that.
 Obscure, profound, and quite inscrutable
 Are all those ways, by which o'er-ruling fate
 Guides us eternal counsels to fulfil.
 Thou know'st that Agamemnon, the great king,
 For whom all Greece was drawn out against Troy,
 To cruel death his daughter offer'd up,
 The Gods themselves thou know'st commanded it.

Mer. The Gods, Euriso, would not have commanded
 That ever to a mother : nor can men,
 Or feel, or understand how we're affected :
 Besides, she for the universal good,
 Went to her death, like one led on in triumph ;
 My child was forc'd to breathe his latest breath
 Under the murthering arm of a base robber.
 Impious and cruel thief, with what fine words !

What

What lies, he glaz'd and painted o'er the deed!
 Who would not have lent faith?—Euriso hear me;
 I will not drag my life on after this;
 Out of these troubles well I know the way;
 But first 'tis meet I satiate with revenge
 My greedy heart: I would within my power
 That wicked wretch, to gather from him first,
 If any part of this belongs to the tyrant;
 Then will I with an ax open his breast
 And thence root out his heart, and with my teeth
 Mangle and tear it all to pieces. Thou,
 O my most faithful friend, help me in this;
 And after that conform to the times. Thy faith
 There will be none to use, do thou at last
 Follow the fortunate, and embrace that side
 For which the Gods have all declar'd themselves.
Eur. My heart's so strongly touch'd, instead of words,
 It sends me only bitter sighs and tears.

End of the Second Act.



A C T



A C T III.

S C E N E I.

Polifonte and Adrastus.

Pol. **I**N such great haste I've sent for thee, Adrastus,
 Impatient to unburthen in thy bosom
 News high and happy. Know Cresfonte's dead;
 The man slain at the bridge was he: myself
 Now of Messenia I may call the king,
 Now say at last that I begin to reign.

Adr. Who can have such great news? I've always seen
 Men lightly credit what they most desire.

Pol. As much as he to penetrate can compass,
 A slave of Merope's, to me reveals,
 Even now he flew to tell me, how she rages
 As for no other cause, the secret now
 Such length of time so cautiously conceal'd,
 Proclaims distractedly: and racks herself
 That with such labour, and so many wiles,
 Nothing could be acquir'd but greater sorrow.

Adr. To her dost thou lend faith? and why must she,
 False for near twenty years, now speak the truth?

Pol. With reason thou suspectest; but I give credit
 Not to her words, to nothing but her grief.
 The servant saw her tear her loosen'd hair,
 Her bosom full of tears, of death her face.
 Raging he saw her rise, and snatch a dagger,

Prevented but by force of her attendants
From opening in her breast an ample wound:
One while she gnashes with her teeth, then shrieks,
Then groaning goes from one room to another,
Crying Cresfonte, O my son Cresfonte:
Just as a bird returning to its young,
And missing them, sees but the broken nest,
Loud screaming round about it restless flies,
Parts and returns and wearies with its moans.

Adr. But how of this is Merope appriz'd?

Pol. So much the servant could not comprehend;
But yet asserts no place is left for doubt.

Adr. Then happy thou for whom all things contend,
In whose behalf even chance has arm'd itself.
Not only snatch'd thy rival from the world,
But fortune also seems to have taken care
To acquit thee of the guilt.

Pol. I've given order
To set the murd'rer free, but yet restrain him
From going forth the palace: now I'm thinking
If means may not be found to set aside
These promis'd, but to me too irksome nuptials:
The vulgar they have nothing more to hope:
Nor in Messene is there any left
Who dare the desp'rate attempt to reign.
No risque contemptible on the other hand
Approaching near that fury: more I fear
Much an unarm'd domestick enemy
Than arm'd and in the field: for thou Adrastus
Well knowst, offended woman never pardons.

Adr. 'Tis rather now the time to give with that
The last impression to their wavering minds,
Who now, by reason of Cresfonte's death,
Are render'd by despair more meek towards thee.
Thou oughtst to be assur'd, that this appearance,
This shew of mercy, will acquire more praise
Than will an hundred dark misdeeds of blame.

That

That done, of haughty Merope do thou
 As best may seem to thee. What then she spreads
 About thy cruelty, will with the people
 Lose of its credit, and be deem'd detraction.
 Nor less is proper, that without delay
 Large funeral pomp on high be lifted up,
 With mourning honours, and with tears well feign'd
 To weep thy foe, and celebrate his death.
 As well to make a shew of change of heart,
 As what may most avail thee to make publick.
Pol. Let all be done ; and since Messene loves
 To be deluded, let her be deluded.
 In time when they shall be a little lull'd,
 And their minds hush'd, help me o' art to govern.
 Down to the Stygian Lake, by oblique ways,
 Shall go the boldest, and the bravest souls ;
 To vices I will give the reins a loose, (rage.
 Which take from vigorous thoughts, and stifle cou-
 Long clemency I'll shew with pomp of mercy
 That may shine on delinquents ; and invite
 To great Offences, whence good men shall stand
 Expos'd, and wicked men find their account
 In full impunity ; and hence themselves
 In cruel civil strife themselves destroying,
 Let them consume their popular rage and fury.
 Thou of decrees shalt often hear the sound,
 And laws redoubled, that to sovereign power
 Shall be a gain to keep, or to transgress :
 Hear every hour of threaten'd wars abroad ;
 Whence I shall go o'er the afflicted commons
 Always increasing weights, and foreign force
 Will introduce. What more ? now I'm arriv'd
 Where nothing hinders me to be but time.
 " Time of itself establishes dominion."
Adr. None can deny, but thou wert born to reign.
 Excelling in the mind, as in degree.

SCENE

S C E N E II.

To them Egistus.

Eg. Great king, defender of the miserable,
 And who with clemency setst off the laws,
 For ever may good heav'n show'r down upon thee
 Gladness and peace, and grant thee all thy wishes.

Pol. Thy crime (if we may justly call a crime
 The purging of the earth from wicked men)
 As it discovers in thee so much valour,
 Has found the way to acquire some grace before me.

Eg. Whatever was the strength, in that encounter
 I us'd to my defence, while I have breath,
 In thine I ever shall be prompt to use.

Pol. How art thou call'd?

Eg. Egistus is my name.

Pol. Of him who fell suppress'd beneath thy blows,
 I would, thou give a more distinct account.

Eg. Already have I said all that I know,
 To that I could add nothing.

Pol. Yet there are
 Those to be found with better information.
 The fact thou seest approv'd by me and prais'd ;
 And thou young man hast nothing more to fear ;
 Discover every thing thou freely mayst.
 And what I ask of thee, imports me much.
 For the slain body, which perhaps e'er this
 Some may have taken up out of the stream,
 I've sent to make strict search : do thou mean time
 Tell me what words he spoke, what he had with
 him,

What thou tookst from him, what with him re-
Adr. I see Ismena, sir, a certain sign (main'd.
 That Merope is near : shun an encounter
 So harsh and grating, better to avoid
 The first impetuous onsets of her grief:

Leave

Leave her at pleasure to discourse the homicide ;
Whence she discovering thee clear of his blood,
New motives may not waken in her heart
To abhor thy nuptials.

Pol. Thou thinkst well Adraftus,
Nor shall we want a time to make this search.

S C E N E III.

Meropè, Ismena, Egistus.

If. He's here alone.

Mer. Wicked and horrid monster !

Now call Euriso hither, bid him haste,
Nor let delay a moment intervene.

Eg. kneels.] O royal lady, virtues great example
And honours, give me leave to breathe my heart
In humble kisses on thy garment's edge.
That mercy which from prison set me free,
And in the gloomy shades of mortal danger
Shone in my favour, I am fully certain,
From thee took motion, and from thee took light.
O may the eternal Gods for ever show'r
Into thy bosom all their choicest gifts ;
And if thou ever meet with adverse fate,
Extend their hand to thee, as thou to others.
I wanting power for more, within my heart
A temple will erect to thee, in which,
As long as spirit shall uphold this frame,
In any foreign land my fate may lead me,
Honour shall be done thy memory and kindness.
Troubled thou heartst, and in thyself collected,
If I may say thou heartst : nor dost thou deign
To give a look : perhaps the royal breast
High thoughts incumber, and I speak untimely.
Ah ! pardon my offence, and suffer yet
That I pray to thee to compleat the work.
I sigh and long for liberty intire.

I'hine only is the pow'r to let me see
Again my country and lov'd household Gods,
And I in thee alone fix all my hope.

S C E N E IV.

Merope, Euriso, Ismena, Egistus.

Eur. At thy commands behold me.

Mer. Quick secure him.

Eur. 'Tis done ; if he flies now he takes this arm.

Eg. How ! wherefore should I ever want to fly ?
Enough, o queen, is not one look from thee ?
Unfold, command thy will, what can I do ?
Wilt thou I fix me here ? here I am fix'd.
Wilt thou I bend my knees ? behold I bend.
Or offer to thy hand my bosom bare ?
Behold it.

Ism. Under such an humble look
Who would believe was hid such wickedness ?

Mer. Get the cords ready now, and bind him fast,
To one of these marble pillars, bind him so,
That he may writhe, and tofs about in vain.

Eg. Heav'n ! what extravagance !

Eur. Come, let's dispatch,
Thou at thy peril, see that thou make not
Nor of resistance, nor of force, the shadow.

Eg. Imagin'st thou thy strength confines me here ?
Art thou a man to daunt me, or to drag
Me in such a manner ? no, not three thy equals
If they surrounded me ; the bears in the forest
I have not dreaded to encounter single.

Eur. So that I bind thee here, babble at pleasure.

Eg. Behold, who binds me : and of all my strength
Deprives me with her look : her royal will
I fear, and I revere : sep'rate from that,

I should e're this have girt thee in these arms
And lifting thee on high, crush'd thee on earth.

Mer. Wilt thou not yet, rash fool, be brought to
Or dost thou seek to hasten on thy fate? (silence?)

Eg. O queen, to thee I yield, thee I obey,
And fit me of myself, to meet thy pleasure.
But a few moments since, and I was freed
By thee from shackles, now I render back
The gift; come thou thyself, and at thy pleasure
Gird, gird me hard: these miserable limbs
By thee were set at large, do thou then bind them.

Ism. I don't believe that he can stir himself.

Mer. Go now and fetch a spear.

Eg. A spear! o fate!

To day what sport of me mak'st thou? which way
Have I committed some new crime? if not,
Say, to what end am I seiz'd here, and bound?

Mer. Traytor, keep thy eyes fix'd low on the earth.

Ism. Behold the steel.

Eur. I take it, and o queen,
Present it to his throat if thou command.

Mer. To me that spear.

Eg. Thus is it meet I die
Like some fierce savage, tangled in a snare?
And not at least be made to know the cause?

Mer. Treacherous monster! thou not know the cause?
Hear me, death of thy ills shall be the least;
I'll stab and lacerate thee here by piecemeal,
If in a moment thou discover not,
All that thou knowst, or if thou dare to lie.
Speak, how did Polifonte find him out?
How knewst him thou?

Eg. Thy words what can they mean?

Mer. Dissemble not, base thief, 'tis all in vain.

Eg. Thy mind great queen, is following some mistake;
Anger I beg thee moderate: the question
Which thou hast ask'd I cannot understand.

Mer.

Mer. Impious assassin, I begin thy torture
With tearing out thy eyes ; dost thou not answer ?

Eg. O ye just Gods ! how can I ever give
Answer, to what I cannot understand ?

Mer. What cannot understand ? Then Polifonte
Him dost thou know ?

Eg. I knew him but this day ;
This day spoke twice to him : if I ever saw
Or knew more of him, may all-powerful Jove
Deny his aid to save me from thy hands.

Ism. What have assassins also got their Jove ?

Eur. But then that innocent blood, what to shed that
Induc'd thee ?

Eg. Thou perhaps of him I kill'd
Speakest now ? what wouldst thou should induce
me to it ?

My own defence, the natural love of life,
Chance, destiny, all these were what induc'd me.

Mer. Ought thus Cresfonte perish ? cruel fortune !

Eg. How can it be, that a vile robber's death
So much may import ?

Mer. Extremity of daring !
Thou vile, thou robber, thou, thou wicked wretch.

Eg. Eternal powers, always rever'd by me,
Succour me now : with eyes of tender mercy
Look down upon my innocence.

Mer. Now tell me :
Before that poor unfortunate expir'd
What did he say ? made he no prayer for life ?
What name pronounc'd he ? call'd he not on
Meropé ?

Eg. No he said nothing. But the king just now
Inquir'd about him, what is here conceal'd ?

Eur. Lady, thou lovest time, and thy revenge.
There may be quickly here, who may prevent thee.

Mer. Die then barbarian.

Eg. Didst thou, o dear mother,
Behold me at this point !

Mer. Hast thou a mother ?

Eg. What sorrow will thine be !

Mer. Barbarous monster ;

I was a mother too, and thou alone

Art cause I now am so no more : 'tis this

Is what destroys thee : thou shalt die fell robber.

Eg. Fatal Messenia ! my poor father told me,

Never to set my foot within Messenia.

Mer. Why never in Messenia ?

Eg. To old men's words

We ought to give good heed.

Mer. Thy father's name ?

Tell it me, and speak quickly.

Eg. The unhappy

Calls himself Polidore.

Mer. How ! Polidore !

From head to foot I feel a chill, Euriso,

That runs thro' me like ice, and quite benumbs me.

Tell me young man how long——

Is. Behold the guards,

Behold the tyrant.

Mer. O ye adverse stars !

Euriso fly, fly thou Ismena too :

For me I nothing care.

S C E N E V.

Polifonte, Merope and Egistus.

Eg. Help me, o king,

Behold how those have treated in thy court, (cords

Whom thou absolv'dst : fast, and with hard strain'd

Thus bound, have they prepar'd to murder me

For that which now is call'd no more a crime,

Since

Since thou approv'st, who reignst, and grace, and
It found t'acquire before thee. (praise

Mer. Does he praise?

Does he approve it? he who seem'd at first
So much enrag'd; alas! I was deceiv'd.

Pol. Unbind him.

Eg. O just king, my life for thee
Hourly to spend were sweet. So great a danger
No day of my past life before encounter'd.
But if thou wouldst that I indeed should live,
O save me from her fury, let thy robe
Shield me from her.

Pol. Go hence, and nothing fear:
Hereafter death to them who do thee wrong.
Rewards attend, not punishment. A deed
Thou'st done, that lifts thee up among the heroes,
And this misdeed of thine, has gone beyond
The famous enterprizes of all others.

Mer. What doubt remains? wretch that I am, and
I let myself be amus'd about a name, (yet
As if there was no other Polidore.

Eg. Now I of adverse fate may thank the strokes,
Since I by them alone secure my breast
Arm'd with the breast plate of the royal grace.

[Exit.

S C E N E VI.

Polifonte and Merope.

Pol. Too much presumption Merope is this:
Then if the news had not flown swiftly to me,
Had he been seen mangled, and slain on earth
Whom I had bid be safe? or in this kingdom
Ought any hand presume to put in bonds
Whom mine had set at large? that name of spouse
Which I have given thee, makes thee arrogate
Too much, and arm in too much wrong against me
So very soon, my own gifts to my offence.

Mer.

Mer. To thee, who reignst, and to avenging justice,
Who always oughtst to lend a powerful arm
It should not be displeasing, that a villain
Fell under punishment and arm'd revenge.

Pol. How wavering thou art ! art thou not she
Who but a little since would have him sav'd ?
Now in a moment, art thou so much chang'd ?
Is it thy pleasure, but to clash with mine ?
If thou seest me condemn him, thou absolv'st ;
If thou seest me absolve him, thou condemnst.

Mer. I knew not then, how full of guilt he was.

Pol. Nor I till now, how full of innocence.

Mer. His life thou gav'st me as a grant before ;
Now grant his death to me.

Pol. 'T would be a sin
To make a mercy null obtain'd by Merope.
But why dost thou afflict thyself ? what part
Hast thou to take ? who could expect from thee
Desires so earnest to revenge that blood ?
Blood of Cresfonte, certain it was not,
He died a little infant in thy arms,
He could not bear the hardship of the flight.

Mer. Ah ! wicked monster, do deride me still,
Leave off to feign, at last thyself discover :
Perhaps thou hop'st the pleasure to behold me
Die here with grief, but that thou shalt not have ;
Grief is subdu'd by rage. Yes, I will live
And live to be reveng'd ; now I to fear
Have nothing left : when running thro' the streets
Rending my vest, and hair, and with my cries
And loud complaints, I'll find t'inflame the people
Stir them all up to arms. Who will there be
That will not follow me ? to thy curst dwelling
With num'rous torches thou shalt see me come
Which I will burn ; tear down the walls, the roofs,
I'll stab thy dearest friends, and in thy blood
Sate my fury : o with what content

With

With how much chearfulness shall I behold thee
 Mangled to pieces ! scatter'd ! o what say I !
 What think ! shall I be then content ? then chearful ?
 Miserable ! not this will call my son from death.
 For that there's nothing should be left undone.
 What then avails ? o me ! whoever prov'd
 Such agonies ? I saw my best-lov'd lord,
 Both my dear little children drag'd away
 And bloodily destroy'd. But one was left me,
 I to save him divorc'd him from my breast,
 And sent him far away, alas ! without
 Pleasure of seeing his increasing growth
 And little infant play. I liv'd in tears
 Shed hourly, always having in my view
 The countenance, the beauty that he had
 When I committed him to Polidore :
 How many weeping nights ! what bitter sighs !
 What wishes ! when at length arriv'd to manhood,
 And just about to set him on the throne,
 Hourly preparing to instruct him well,
 In rules by which his father us'd to reign :
 Nay in my heart had I provided for him
 Even a bride : when see a sudden stroke
 Of bloody and inexorable death
 Robs me for ever of him ; and denies me
 So much as once to see him, and without
 Having his ashes : but all lacerated,
 Kill'd, and unburied, and to fish a prey
 And like some lab'ring hind, drove by the torrent.
P. aside] Nor harp, nor lute, were ever yet so grateful ;
 As now the tuneful sound of these laments,
 Undoubted proofs my rival foe's extinct.
Mer. Why did ye, o ye Gods preserve him then ?
 Or why till now preserve him ? ah ! alas !
 Was it alone to feed my flatter'd hopes ?

Why

Why in that fatal day did he not perish,
 That of our ruin, then when grief of his
 Had been confus'd with many other deaths?
 But you are bent on cruelty: but now
 Over the traitor stood I with a spear
 And you confus'd my senses, made it so
 That I was like a child: I am denied
 The miserable pleasure of revenge.
 O heav'ns! what have I ever done? but thou,
 Thou who hast took all from me, dost thou leave
 Life? why if thou delight so much in blood,
 Is mine refus'd? shall we then for my torture
 See thee at last become compassionate?
 To my poor son thou wert not so. O stars!
 If thou wast jealous of the throne, in woods
 In mountains, among shepherds to abide
 Obscure his days, what hinder'd thee to send him?
 I had been over-paid, had he but liv'd.
 To me what was his reigning? cruel tyrant,
 Take thee thy kingdom, give me back my child.
Pol. Feminine sorrow never knows a bound;
 Cease Merope: since our approaching nuptials
 Shall well repair thy loss; and in short time
 Thy ills shall cover with forgetfulness.
Mer. Forgetfulness eternal, thither I
 Myself know well to carry all my ills;
 But grant me Jove one prayer: let me not go
 Down to the gloomy realms of night, a shade
 Derided utterly, and unreveng'd.

End of the Third Act.

A C T



ACT IV.

SCENE I.

Adrastus and Ismena.

Adr. **I**N brief the whole may be compriz'd in this;
That if the change not thought against to-morrow,

And shew herself in readiness to obey
The royal will, all those to her most dear,
All her most ancient friends well known to me
Before her shall with violence be drag'd,
And in her sight shall one by one be slain.
This from the king I have in charge to thee,
And further, that thou bear the same to her.

Ism. Unheard-of inhumanity! examples
Barbarous beyond whatever yet was known!

Adr. Refusing good, let none be griev'd at ill.

Ism. This is a good, than every ill more grievous.

Adr. A vain imagination cheats the sense,

And grief from all high joys is known to rise.

Ism. To thee seems it a joy to suffer nuptials

When every thing she hears, and all she sees

Will waken nothing in her but her tears?

Adr. Of her both heav'n, and fate have thus dispos'd.

Ism. Fate has oppress'd her, heav'n abandon'd her.

Adr. Let her be silent, and forget what's past.

Ism. She well can hold her peace, but not forget

Silence is in her power, oblivion not.

Adr. Who chuse the worst let them accuse themselves.

G

Ism

Ism. She knows no worst beyond the cruel king.

Adr. Cruel is he, who offers joy and honour ?

Ism. A bitter joy to her whose heart refuses.

Adr. And why refuse, what all besides desire ?

Ism. But she desires the rack, and death before it.

Adr. Yes, granting death were nothing but a name.

Ism. Her matchless virtue is unknown to thee.

Adr. In virtues then if she abound so much

Let her shew one at least to suit the times.

Except this wasting night she has no more

To make her ready in : thou if thou lov'st her,

Shew it, dispose her, to embrace her good.

The pilot's mad, who don't consult the winds.

[Exit.]

SCENE II.

Ismena and afterwards Egistus.

Ism. Ah ! Where will ever end the bitter sport ?

Which fortune makes of this unhappy queen ?

For me methinks I see, we just are come

To the point, where she against herself, her threats

Will execute, and quickly with her blood

Call funeral sorrows, from our eyes, and hearts,

Fate ever to be wept !

Eg. O beauteous maid,

I beg thee by that heav'n which smiles upon thee ;

Tell me, does still the heart of Merope

Lodge such a rage so fiercely bent against me ?

Rage finds long harbour oft in royal hearts,

And I so dread it, every passing moment

Methinks I see her coming with that spear

Lifted against my side, this hour of night

In which I want repose, I scarcely dare

Venture to take it.

Ism. Put away that fear ;

Vain fear, and too much wrong to him who reigns,

And

And stands in thy defence.

Eg. That gives me heart,
But for my further peace, o courteous maid,
Obtain by intreaty from her, that my crime,
(What crime that is I know not) may be pardon'd.

Ism. Of that there is no need, because her anger
Kindled against thee in her heart, is vanish'd
Already of itself.

Eg. The Gods be thank'd.
But of such sorrow, such unbridled rage,
What could be cause? I from her broken accents
Could not arrive to gather her suspicion:
Clouded in some great error, she in vain
Laments and mourns for a vile cruel thief.

Ism. All to discover to thee I refuse not;
But it is meet that thou detain thee here
A little space: elsewhere my duty calls me.

Eg. As long as it may please thee I attend.

Ism. But go not hence, make me not after this
Return in vain.

Eg. I give my faith in pledge.
Where can I go wasting the night? where find
To give by sleep to my o'erwearied limbs,
And my afflicted thoughts a short refreshment?
This porch appears the most convenient place
Where, as I may, I'll take a little rest;
From the moon's cold and humid rays I there
At least shall be defended,

Ism. Thither to thee,
Within a little time I make return. [Exit.

S C E N E III.

Egistus.

O palaces of kings ! of perils full,
 With cares, and troubles compass'd round about,
 O pastoral recess ! paternal cottage !
 Where ? where art thou ? How sweet is it to live
 In solitude, the pure and open heav'n
 In peace enjoying, and earth's native riches !
 Slumbers how sweet lull'd by the whisp'ring wind,
 What pleasure to arise with the glad morn,
 And all the day pursue the chearful hunt,
 At evening sun returning from the chace,
 Meeting glad parents, then to shew the prey,
 Recount each accident, and every stroke !
 There no disdain, no envy, nor no fear
 Arrives, the torment of a mind perplex'd,
 No thirst of ruling power, of honours none.
 Ill, very ill, did I advise myself,
 To leave such blessings to become a wanderer :
 O pastoral recess ! paternal cottage !
 Where ? where art thou ? But in this bitter day
 Of body such fatigue, of heart such trouble
 Have I encounter'd, that I'm overcome
 And harrass'd out with too much weariness,
 And opportune these seats tho' of cold stone ;
 How dear to me would be my homely bed !
 What sleep there could I take ! how sweet is sleep !

S C E N E

S C E N E IV.

Euriso and Polidore.

Eur. Behold, o stranger, in the royal palace
What was by thee requested : thro' those doors
Is passage to th' apartment, where the king
Mostly abides ; and further to advance
To thee is not permitted : from thy eyes
Why do I see tears falling down thy cheek ?

Pol. O child, didst thou but know, what sweet re-
membrance

Awakens in my breast ! one while I saw,
I saw this court ; and know this place again :
In that time too, thus was the usual custom
T'illuminate the night. But I, young man,
Was not what now thou seest me : ruddy cheeks ;
And vigour, in rough wrestling, or in running,
That to the swiftest, or the most robust,
Refus'd to yeild : but time keeps passing on
And not returns. Now for thy guiding me,
Hither thus courteously, I, as I may,
Render thee thanks.

Eur. I much more willingly
Should have conducted thee to my own house,
That there thy limbs by age, more than by travel
Worn and afflicted, might be comforted.

Pol. Here may it please thee leave me. Mayn't I know
The name of him who shews me so much kindness?

Eur. Son of Nicandro ; I am call'd Euriso.

Pol. Nicandro, he who dwelt upon the hill ;
So dear to the good king Cresfonte?

Eur.

He.

Pol. Does he yet live?

Eur.

No, all his days are number'd.

Pol.

Pol. How much it grieves me! he was liberal,
 He was humane; and all when he appear'd
 Did him due honour. I remember him
 As long as since he kept his marriage feast
 With joyful pomp and Silvia was his bride,
 The daughter of Olympia, and of Glicon;
 And Glicon he was brother to Hipparchus.
 Then thou'rt that little boy, that to the court
 Silvia was us'd to lead in pride to shew thee.
 To me it seems but th'other day. How fast
 Ye youths, ye hurry on to men, and seem
 Tho' silent, to call out to us, give place!

Eur. The knowledge, friend, thou seem'st to have
 of mine,

Wakes greater will to make me grateful to thee.
 I beg thee then, of every thing of mine,
 Make thyself master, for, and at thy pleasure.

Pol. All I desire at present, good Euriso,
 Is that thou leave me here conceal'd, and speak
 To none in any sort about me.

Eur. Easy.

In this to please thee is the task. Adieu. [*Exit*]

S C E N E V.

Polidore and Egistus, who sleeps.

That I encountred with this courteous man
 Was my good fortune, who has not disdain'd
 Hither conducting me at this late hour:
 Since now this city seems to me so alter'd
 From what it was, I'd scarcely found my way.
 'Twas a good thought to enter thus by night,
 And unobserv'd; for thus I shall conceal me
 In the least noble part of the palace: known
 To but a few, and wholly unsuspected
 I may with caution in the royal lodgings

Enter,

Enter, when time may serve, with privacy :
 In the mean time here I'll sit down, and rest.
 I see one of the servants there asleep.
 That habit wakes strange motions in my heart.
 Desire has enter'd me to see his face,
 Which now he covers with his arm : But hush
 I think I hear the tread of feet ; this door
 Is opening too, 'tis proper I obscond.

S C E N E VI.

*Ismena, afterwards Merope with an Ax ; Egistus
 sleeping.*

Ism. Now if it please the queen stay here. In truth
 No more I see him. 'Twas a hope too vain,
 That he should put in me a confidence ;
 My flatt'ring myself, perhaps more vain,
 His being so simple as to enter there.
 Where now to seek him I know not. But peace,
 In sleep profound behold where he lies buried.
 Come forth, o queen, at once come forth ; he sleeps
 Deeply.

Mer. And whereabouts?

Ism. Behold him there,
 See, if in better guise, more to thy wish
 Fortune could have presented him.

Mer. 'Tis true ;
 Now the just gods have drawn him to the snare.—
 Dear, and unhappy shade, and till this moment
 Shade unreveng'd of my slain son, accept
 This sacrifice, accept this blood, which I
 T'appease thy ghost now shed upon the earth.

S C E N E

S C E N E VII.

To them Polidore.

Stay, stay o queen, oh me, I bid thee stay.

Mer. Rash wretch, who art ?

Eg. O Gods, o Gods assist me,
Remains this fury still? [*Runs off.*]

Mer. Yes, yes, escape.

Pol. Stay here, alas ! and be at peace.

Mer. Escape,
Still this one time escape : but from these hands
Thou shalt not always fly, not if I thought
To slay thee in the arms of Polifonte.

Pol. O Gods, why dost not hear me ?

Mer. But thou, madman,
Shalt pay——and yet thy hoary age prevents
From killing thee. What daring, what distraction——

Pol. Dost thou know Polidore no longer ?

Mer. What ?

Pol. Yes, calm thyself ; behold thy ancient servant ;
Myself am he ; and he whom thou wouldst kill,
He is Cresfonte, is thy son.

Mer. What ! lives he ?

Pol. Lives he ! didst thou not see him ? he no longer
Would have been living, had not I been here.

Mer. Oh me !

Pol. Sustain her virgin. Joy extreme,
And such an unexpected change at heart
Have robb'd her spirits : quickly if thou hast
Ought of enlivening quality, apply it ;
Now thou dost well. O how I thank the Gods,
For bringing me in such a time of need,
And causing me not to defer a moment
My ent'ring in the palace : o what cruel,
What wretched, and unheard-of, spectacle,

If I had not been here!

Ism.

I'm so confus'd

That what I do, between surprize and joy,
I scarcely know. O my lov'd queen, return,
Take heart, now is the time to live.

Pol.

Already,

See, she begins to move——now she revives.

Mer. Where, o where am I? do I dream or rave?

Ism. Neither my queen. Behold before thy eyes

The faithful Polidore, and he assures

Thus of thy son, he does not only live,

But lives strong, healthy, graceful, in thy presence;

I'd almost said.

Mer.

And do you not deceive me?

Art thou indeed then Polidore?

Pol.

Look on me,

Review me, can it be thou knowst me not,

Tho' but by light of these uncertain torches?

Hither I came to thee, because Cresfonte

I've sought in various parts, and that together—

Mer. Yes, thou indeed art he; I know thee now

Tho' alter'd much by age.

Pol.

Time pardons none.

Mer. And dost thou tell me certainly, that youth

Is my Cresfonte? art thou not deceiv'd?

Pol. Deceiv'd? and how? when standing there behind,

I thence could plainly all his face discern,

And feed my eyes at full. Now what unlucky

Impulse, what destiny blinded thy mind?

Mer. O my dear servant, pity made me cruel:

I thought who is my son had slain my son.

An hundred things agreed all to deceive me;

And even the ring which I had given to thee,

Others affirm'd he had stol'n from a youth,

Murder'd by him.

Pol.

The ring he had from me

H

With

With order tho' to keep it hid.

Mer. O stars!

Can it be true then, that the so much sigh'd-for,
The so much long'd-for, and my dear Cresfonte
At last is in Messene? and that I

Am now the happiest woman in the world?

Pol. Thou mak'st me also weep with tenderness.

Of nature, and of blood, o sacred ties!

How strong are you, and o our hearts how weak!

Mer. O heav'n! and twice I grasp'd the steel, and

Prepar'd the blow: o how I feel within! (twice

Twice, Polidore, I've run this risque to day:

Thought of it strikes my uncollected sense

On every nerve, and my heart melts away.

Ism. Such wond'rous accidents no man perhaps

Ever saw feign'd in scenery.

Mer. Let praises

Be giv'n the merciful eternal Gods,

Who not consented to such cruelty,

Praise be to thee Cinthia Triform, to thee

Who all beholding from thy beauteous car

Scatter'd a silver light. My son where is he?

This was the way he fled; be where he will

I shall know well to find him: dear Ismena,

I shall, as I believe, die with the pleasure

When I embrace him, clasp him, kiss him.

Pol. Ah!

Whither art hasting?

Mer. Why dost thou detain me?

Pol. Stay.

Mer. Let me pass.

Pol. Thou speak'st as unadvis'd.

Dost thou not call to mind, that in the palace

Of Polifonte now thou art? his guards

That thou'rt amidst, that thou'rt amidst his ser-

Let one of these see thee in tenderness (vants?

O'er the young prince, are we not then all lost?

He

He never was in greater risque than now,
Nor we in greater need to act with caution.
'Tis proper first to rule our own affections ;
Who knows not how to bridle those desires,
Which hourly shake like winds our yielding hearts,
Nothing but sorrow let him hope to meet
Thro' all his life. So far from an embrace,
Be greatly on thy guard to look upon him ;
Only of that take care ; lest love maternal
Breaking all limits down betray the secret,
And throw to earth the work of many years,
How to contain himself that he may know,
I shall discover to him, who he is
Immediately, and to the full instruct him.
With thy most faithful friends we'll hold a council,
And with mature discretion to arrive
To hit the mark aright, shall be our study.

All is obtain'd, where prudence is the guide.

For want of that too often enterprizes
Of weight, and carried on for many years
With great fatigue and travel, we have seen
Precipitate in the end ; and thou'rt appriz'd
That from the event, is judg'd the undertaking ;
Tho' a great deal, and still much more be done ;
Who not compleats the work, he has done nothing.

Mer. My faithful servant, thou art now and ever
The same wise Polidore.

Pol. Age does not bring
All evils with it : the heart resting then
Calm, from the ruffling of the affections free,
If then the eyes are dim, the mind is clear,
If the feet stagger, yet the counsel's steady.

Mer. But tell me, is Cresfonte strong of body ?

Pol. As strong as any man.

Mer. And has he courage ?

Pol. Ill for the man who dares to make a proof.

Has he got courage ? it has been his sport

To travel in the woods, and enter combat
 With savages o'the proudest, in an hundred,
 An hundred, and an hundred such encounters
 I never saw a mark of fear upon him.

Mer. Perhaps he's headstrong then, and fierce.

Pol.

No neither,

Towards us, who he believ'd to be his parents,
 Was never seen a milder. O how often
 Perceiving him so ready to obey,
 And humble to me, thinking to myself,
 He was my lord, and I ought to obey,
 Tears came into my eyes! and I've been forc'd
 To hurry me away, and give in private
 A vent to my full heart, and to my tears
 An open course.

Mer.

O me compleatly blest!

My heart wants room to entertain my joy.
 Of all thou'st said I've seen apparent signs;
 With such an humble voice, such meek behaviour
 To me addressing, nothing could be more:
 But when by others seiz'd on, hadst thou seen,
 He turn'd like a fierce lion; if indeed
 At my command he yielded, yet he yielded
 Just as a mastiff, over whom his master
 Stands threat'ning with a whip, who shews his teeth,
 And yet refrains, who in a fierce humility
 Submits, and snarls, at once obeys, and growls.
 O courteous destiny, whatever ills
 Have been allotted me I fully pardon:
 Perhaps I can't so easily forgive,
 That now at pleasure I may not embrace,
 Hear, and behold my child. But what my friend,
 What can I ever give? where can I find
 Reward to equal thy deservings?

Pol.

Me,

My own service pays, I have enough reward
 In seeing thee content. What wouldst thou give me?

I covet nothing : that alone to me
Would be most grateful none have pow'r to give.
The heavy weight of years I would have lighten'd,
Which lyē upon my head, and crouch me down,
And press me so, to me it seems a mountain.
I'd give all the world's riches, all its kingdoms
For youth.

Mer. 'Tis a chief blessing.

Pol. But this blessing,
Who has it, keeps it not, for while he has it,
He loses it.

Mer. Come now, since of repose,
(For certain thou art tir'd) thou standst in need.

Pol. To me 't has happen'd as it does to sportsmen,
Who scarce sustain themselves at close of day :
But if by chance, and where they least expected,
They start fresh game, active and prompt they fly,
They feel no pain for their long fruitless search,
And quite forget their weariness. However
I obey thee, and follow : but this ax
Must not remain behind here.

Mer. Tho' Cresfonte
Be now in power of his deadly foe,
I know not how to grieve, nor can I fear:
Since powerful Jove would never have preserv'd him
Amidst such strange, and in so many dangers,
But that he wills to have him in his keeping
In future time.

Pol. Let us, however, let us
Do what is found our duty : since the future
Thick darkness hides, impenetrable night
Always surrounds it, and the Gods command it.

End of the Fourth Act.

A C T



A C T V.

S C E N E I.

Egistus and Polidore.

Eg. **N**O more, father, no more; had I believ'd
Ever I could have caus'd thee so much
trouble,

I should have died e'er I had set my foot
From home. I thought in few days to return;
But accidents so strange as I have told thee,
And so severe withal, have happen'd to me,
My fault has been enough my punishment.

Pol. Who governs by his own conceit does thus.

Eg. From thy commands thou never more shalt see
Me swerve; and seeing now kind heav'n has
granted,

Here I am found by thee, I here make promise
Quickly to use all means, to obtain a grant
Hence to depart, and back with thee return
To native soil.

Pol. If native soil thou lov'st,
Thou must not hence depart.

Eg. My ancient mother,
Wouldst thou I leave her in grief?

Pol. Thy mother
Would have thee here.

Eg. Here? that perhaps may be
Because I have my father near me.

Pol. Rather,

Thy mother near, and father too far off.

Eg. What sayst thou ? always in the jaws of death

Here I should be ; Merope seeks my blood.

Pol. Rather for thee would gladly spill her own.

Eg. If twice already she has sought to kill me !

Pol. Hate it appear'd, but it was love extreme.

Eg. The king came in, or I too well had seen it.

Pol. He wants thee extinct, which yet thou dost not

Eg. If he defended me from others rage ! [know.

Pol. Love it appear'd, but it was mortal hate.

Eg. Father, what speakst thou ? what intangled sense ?

These new enigmas what are they ?

Pol. O son !

My son no more ! at length is come the time,

The riddle must be solv'd, the truth unvail'd.

Fate has conducted thee, where now thou canst

Be ignorant of thyself without great risque

No longer. For that reason at first dawn

Of the morn I came to seek thee. 'Tis my duty

At last to open to thee, the high secret.

Eg. My soul thou hast suspended so, my heart

Bounds in my bosom.

Pol. Know then thou art not

What thou believ'st : know I am not thy father,

Thy servant I, thou to no servant son,

But a king's son.

[Kneels.

Eg. Dost thou make mockery of me ?

Dost thou jest with me father ? and make sport ?

Pol. This is no matter, nor no time for jests,

No I jest not : recollect all thy spirits,

And hear me speak. Thy name is not Egistus,

Thy name's Cresfonte. Hast thou never heard

Cresfonte of this realm once king, was father

To three sons ?

Eg. Yes, and that in infancy

They were destroy'd.

Pol. Not all, since thou the third

Art

Art of those sons.

Eg. O what dost thou relate!

Pol. Truth I relate; thou of that king art son:
Thy mother Merope snatch'd thee with art
From Polifonte's cruel hands, and gave
To me her faithful servant to bring up
Conceal'd, and to revenge, and to the kingdom
Reserve thee.

Eg. In astonishment I'm lost,
And stand in doubt to credit thee, or not.

Pol. Thou oughtst to credit me, for what I say,
The same I swear; that gem (a royal jewel)
Merope gave to me, and now because
'T had been asserted to her, tho' in wrong,
Thou hadst stol'n it from another, she desir'd
To have thy life extinguish'd, and in thee,
Sought for thy murd'rer.

Eg. Now I understand:
Then is it true great Jove! that in a moment
Myself transform'd, am I, no longer I?
But son to a king? then is this kingdom mine,
And I am heir.

Pol. 'Tis true the kingdom's thine,
And thou art heir: but o how long——

Eg. The blood
That flows within these veins, is then from Her-
O how I feel myself enlarge! hadst thou (cules.
Discover'd that alone to me, my years
Ignobly, in inglorious idleness
Had not been plung'd. Perhaps by this time fame
My name would have proclaim'd; and the Messe-
Seeing at last exploits like Hercules, (nians
Might have accepted me, perhaps e'er now
Have broke asunder the curst tyrant's yoke.
Always I've plainly felt within my breast
A certain ardour, not well understood,
That spurr'd me forwards, tho' I knew not whither.

Pol.

Pol. 'Twas proper to conceal for that sole reason
Thee from thyself; thy valour had betray'd thee,
And left expos'd to Polifonte's power,
As well as to his various wicked frauds.

Eg. Then in this place my father's blood was spilt;
Here my two innocent brother's—and that traitor
Still reigns he? with a sceptre none of his
Goes he still proudly on? it shan't be long.
From hence I run but to procure a dagger;
I'll stab it in his breast up to the hilt,
I will, here, in the midst of all his guards:
So that may come to pass let what will happen;
Heav'n will direct the rest.

Pol. Stay here.

Eg. What wouldst thou?

Pol. Where dost thou go?

Eg. Leave me.

Pol. Blindness of youth!

O whither leads thy unadvised rage?

Eg. For what art thou concern'd?

Pol. Death——

Eg. To another

I bear it.

Pol. Drawst it on thyself.

Eg. At last

Leave me.

Pol. Alas! my son, for I my son

Always shall call thee, see me on my knees:

By this white hair, and by these ancient arms,

With which so often to my breast I've clasp'd thee;

If love has any share of power left,

Or if tears can intreat, restrain I beg

This unsafe ardour: let compassion move

Of mother, of the kingdom, and thyself.

Eg. Father, for such indeed thou wast to me,

Rise, I intreat thee rise, and be at peace:

My will is ever to appear to thee,

I

What

What heretofore I've been. But wouldst thou not,
That now at last I arm me for revenge?

Pol. I will ; all which is done is to this end ;
But enterprizes great, and difficult,
Not headlong measures, not unbridled rage
Guide to good ends ; but knowledge, art, and
To suffer, to dissemble, to foresee. (counsel ;
Young men are at a loss : but I shall shew
Thy proper conduct ; me thou mayst believe,
Since thy great father also he believ'd me,
And his wife counsellors ne'er set at nought
My opinion ; yet what prudent men were they ?
There are no more of those great minds.

Eg. And thou,
Dost thou believe that if this people saw
The loath'd usurper bite the earth in death,
And I discover'd me, in every heart
Would not for me ancient allegiance war ?

Pol. Allegiance child ? ah ! these are times no more
For that, in mine it has been seen, but now
The world is too degenerate, and men
Become too wicked : but I call to mind,
And will to thee relate a circumstance :
There was ———

Eg. Be silent, here comes forth the tyrant.

Pol. Let us avoid him, we may stand conceal'd
Behind those pillars.

SCENE II.

Polifonte, Adrastus.

Pol. Full solicitous ;
And time enough however dost thou urge me.

Adr. Yet every thing's prepar'd : and at the temple
Already wait the bulls with gilded horns,
And crown'd with flowers : while Arabian smoke
Of foreign odours, while the cheerful sound

Of

Of instruments harmonious fill the air :
A multitude immense make up the crowd,
Rejoicing and applauding.

Pol. Now let Merope
Be call'd—Her to conduct I leave to thee.
I go before, to shew me to the people,
Deriding them because they have no mind,
And their deaf Gods, who never had nor mind,
Nor sense. What man, what God, out my hand
Can wrest the sceptre now ? since dust and shadows
Are all who o'er the kingdom could assume
A right. My valour, and my craft, Adrastus,
They were my Gods. With them I overcame
And quell'd the outrage of a private fate ;
In arms, in blood, amidst a thousand dangers,
Open'd at last a passage to a throne :
With these I fix my footing here for ever :
Tho' earth, and even heav'n oppose in vain,
Now I hear Merope : Of her take care,
And if she still withstand, at last a dagger
Plunge in her breast ; if she refuse my nuptials
To Pluto let her go, and wed with him.

S C E N E III.

Merope, Ismena, Adrastus.

Mer. What punishment, Ismena, o what torture !

Ism. At last take heart.

Mer. To me the Gods ne'er gave
One lucky chance without disasters equal.

Ism. Command thyself, and wait for chearful days.

Mer. apart.] For thee Cresfonte, I must suffer all.

Adr. O queen see I attend : what now detains thee ?

Mer. apart.] Of a bad lord, a servant yet more
wicked.

Adr. To such a joyful act in mourning weeds ?

Mer. Utmost internal grief it witnesses.

Adr. This sorrow to thy husband gives offence.

Mer. What dost thou say? not yet is he my husband.

Adr. Or else on all thy friends a fierce revenge.

Mer. O wicked, impious, and infernal thought!

Ism. apart to Mer.] Yield, yield to destiny, and don't prevent

Th' important blow so ready to be struck.

Mer. apart to Ism.] This is the only thought, all that refrains

From stabbing me this moment; this the hope

For which I fain would yield, and force myself

To do a violence to my heart; but oh!

My soul, alas! flies from it, fills with scorn

And becomes horror all.

Adr. If with fresh slaughter
Even now thou wouldst not see the ground o'er.
Cut off delay; for know my duty is, [spread
To the temple to conduct thee, now a bride.

Mer. Or say a victim.

Adr. What if that be true?

Seems that so new? do we not often see

A royal lady is but a state victim?

Mer. But let us go: the Gods when my part comes
Perhaps may light fresh thoughts up in my heart.
At last Ismena let us hence. Ah me!

S C E N E IV.

Egistus and Polidore.

Eg. She who is forc'd along there, is my mother.

Pol. A painful step and hard indeed is that,

Which the fierce tyrant forces her to take:

But what else can be done? perhaps some good

Out of this ill may rise: since oftentimes

Suffering, and to the times ourselves adapting

Have chang'd strong poison to an antidote.

M E R O P E.

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Eg. To see the solemn pomp, I to the temple
Shall take my way.

Pol. Child go ; the minds of youth
Are stir'd with curiosity : go thou,
But I can't follow thee : in such a throng
I could not stand my ground : but if I was
As I was once, when for intire long days
Thy father I have followed in the chase,
With pleasure I would bear thee company ;
If my desires push forward, yet my feet
Keep me behind. Do thou however go,
And all the while take heed, be sure take heed,
Thy mother's eye may never light upon thee.

Eg. 'Tis needless to take any thought of that.

S C E N E V.

Polidore, afterwards Euriso.

Pol. Unfriendly stars indeed shone at the birth
Of that unhappy lady. How he errs
Whoe'er he be who from the height of state
Measures felicity ! How blind the vulgar
That think proud palaces are full of joy !
Who lives among the great, full well discerns,
That how much more sublime the fortune is,
So much the more the sorrows weigh, so much
Are troubles sharper, so much greater cares.

Eur. My guest here still ? I much rejoice to see thee ;
But thou hast set thy foot within a court
O'er-run with wickedness, a cruel soil.

Pol. My friend, the whole world is full of grief and
trouble :

'Tis easy to change place, but not our fate.
So has it pleas'd the Gods. Unhappy he
Who does believe (and who does not believe)
To pass his days in quiet and content.

This

This life is all deceit ; and we go on
Hoping for good, but always suffering ill.

Eur. But why dost thou who art a stranger here,
Not go to the temple to behold the pomp
Of the rich sacrifice?

Pol. O, I'm not curious
Not in the least. With me the season's over.
Of sacrifices I have seen enough.
I can remember that too, when Cresfonte
Began his reign : then was there pomp indeed.
But now such sacrifices are no more,
In latter times. More than an hundred beasts
Were kill'd ; the priests all shone resplendent,
And turn which way you would, nothing was seen,
But gold and silver. But I think that thou
Shouldst care to see the nuptials of thy king.

Eur. Ah ! didst thou know, what was to be the end
Of all those preparations made for joy !
For me, I han't a heart to be in sight
Of any thing so dismal and so horrid.

Pol. What can there happen?

Eur. Of this royal house
If thou'rt inform'd already, thou must know,
To Merope how bitter, how disastrous
This Marriage needs must be. Now understand,
A Resolution she has firmly fix'd,
Should she be drawn to such an hard extreme,
In sight of all the people, in the temple
To stab herself to the heart. And thus she chuses
Herself to set at large ; flatters her mind
At such an horrid spectacle, the crowd
Insensible before, will then be struck,
That they will fly at once upon the tyrant,
And tear him piecemeal. She's indeed a woman
Too capable of this : and doubtless does it.
For me she sent about the break of day
With pressing haste ; but heaven dispos'd it so

I'm

I'm not arriv'd in time: else certainly
She thought to have giv'n me the last farewell :
Hard-fated, and unhappy queen.

Pol. My heart
How thou hast struck it ! I was here indeed
When she departed, all her form was changed,
Already cover'd with a mortal paleness.

Oh wretched mournful end of such a queen !

Eur. But hark, the temple's near, dost thou not hear
An hideous noise come from it ?

Pol. I hear something.

Eur. The blow is struck for certain, if for that
Rises a tumult, I among the rest
Will take the better part, and share their fate.

S C E N E VI.

Polidore, and afterwards Ismena.

Pol. Unhappy me, ah ! what has now avail'd
Such risques, such labours ! for without the queen
What more is to be done ?

Ism. Merciful Gods !
This day with-hold not from us your blest aid.

Pol. Child stay, and hear ; ah ! whither dost thou go ?

Ism. Old man what dost thou here ? what, knowst
thou nothing ?

A sacrifice unheard of ; human blood,

A royal victim.——

Pol. Fate ! at what a point

Thou'st brought me hither ?

Ism. Say, what is it moves thee ?
Dost thou weep Polifonte ?

Pol. Polifonte !

Ism. Yes, Polifonte lyes in his own blood.

Pol. But who has kill'd him ?

Ism. 'Tis thy son has kill'd him.
Pol.

Pol. What in the temple? daring out of measure!

Ism. Peace, he has done a deed, from whence his name

With glory crown'd shall go thro' every age.

He has gone beyond the heroes, his first labour

So many done by his great ancestor

Perhaps may obscure. The sacrifice prepar'd

Stood ready, and from off the head, the hair

The priest had cut to cast it in the flame.

On one side stood the king, on th'other side,

Like one about to die, went Merope,

All round about the large admiring crowd

Immoveable and silent. I being rais'd

Somewhat above the floor, beheld Cresfonte

Break thro' the press, and with great difficulty

Force himself forward, all his face inflam'd,

And different quite from what he us'd to be;

Open'd his way up boldly, near the altar,

And fix'd directly opposite the tyrant.

Haughty and gloomy there a while he stood,

Rolling his eyes about askaunce, and fierce;

Here all narration's lost; because his seizing

The sacred ax prepar'd among the vessels,

And horribly extending it in air,

Cutting the wicked king just in the neck,

Was one sole moment; the same point of time,

The steel I saw high shining in the air,

And the wretch fall at length flat on the earth.

The crimson blood flew spurling the white vest

Of the priest; and now a general cry was heard,

But he his blows redoubled on the ground.

Adrastus, who was near, attack'd Cresfonte;

But the fierce youth, like a wild bear enrag'd,

Turn'd on him, and the ax into his breast

Struck furiously. Now who could paint the mother?

She like a tygress rag'd, plac'd herself

Before her son, to whom against him came

Offering

Offering her bosom. Loud in broken accents,
She cried, *It is my son, it is Cresfonte,*
This is your king : but the great throng and uproar
Suppress'd all speech : some wanting to be gone;
Others to get more forward : justling now,
And then again being justled, multitudes
Confus'd, and waving like ripe corn to the wind;
And knowing not for why ; running, retiring,
Pushing, interrogating ; cries, and terrour,
Children and women smother'd in the crowd ;
O what a dreadful scene ! in his own power
And loose, the bull increas'd the horror, leaping;
And lowing, till the temple eccho'd round
From its high-arched roof. Who strives to go,
Urges, but is kept back, and too much haste
Retards him : while the guards who kept the gates
Strove, tho' in vain, to enter, to draw out
And separate the multitude. Meantime
A band of ancient friends were got about us :
The bold Cresfonte's eyes sparkled like flame ;
With a majestick and undaunted air,
Surrounded by his party he set forward,
To leave the temple. I, who now was free,
Remain'd at the dark avenue, which leads
To the palace, there I ran, and looking back,
Saw, horrid sight ! disfigur'd and convuls'd,
His head and thigh open with wounds, where lay
And drench'd as in a sea of blood the tyrant :
Adrastus prostrate on the earth half living
And writhing still about. His dying eyes
Dim rolling as he gasp'd, are still before me.
The altar overturn'd, and on the ground
Tripods, knives scatter'd round, and broken vases.
But why do I stay here ? To arm the servants,
Secure the gates, and stand on our defence,
Will quickly be our part, for we shall suffer
Undoubtedly e'er long a sharp attack.

K

SCENE

S C E N E VII.

*Polidore, afterwards Merope, Egisthus, Euriso, with
other Citizens.*

Pol. O Gods, without your high immortal aid,
Such mighty facts as these we never see.
Assist us from your heaven. Alas! my limbs
Why are you not what you were wont to be?
How ready and how fierce should I——But see.

Mer. Yes, o Messenians yes, I swear it too,
This is my son, my third, which I conceal'd,
Even till now kept hid: this is the heir,
The blood is this of your good king Cresfonte,
Of that Cresfonte, who you scarcely knew
Whether he was your father or your king,
Of that Cresfonte you so long have mourn'd:
How just he was, call back to your remembrance,
Call back how very liberal, and meek.
He that lies yonder weltring in his blood,
Is that usurper, thief, that wicked rebel,
Tyrant, who treacherously pierc'd the bosom
Of his legitimate king, and of his children,
Defenceless as they were, and made their limbs
Be scatter'd: he it is who every right
Has violated; has condemn'd the laws,
Yes, and the Gods; who never yet was sated
Neither with gold nor blood; who for distrust
Thio' vain, has put to death so many wretches
And strew'd their ashes, and even your very walls
Has raz'd, destroy'd and burnt. Say which of you
From whom or father, brother, son, or kinsman,
Has he not taken? are ye yet in doubt?
Are ye not yet assur'd this is my son?
Look on his face; do ye not there behold
The father in his brow? but if his look
Extort not your belief, believe my heart;

Believe

Believe this rage of love, that has beset me,
That agitates me all, and warms me all :
Behold th'old man (heaven brings him here before
The old man that brought him up. (me)

Pol. Yes, I myself——

Mer. But what? what proof? what witness can there
need?

This action proves him : tyrants in their temples
Are not attack'd and brought to earth by youths
From other loins descended, or whose veins
Have not the blood of Hercules. What hope
Can Sparta now, or Elis raise against you
If such an hero but conduct your arms?

Eur. O queen, our silence is th'effect of wonder,
Wonder profound, which still surrounds our hearts,
And mine above all others : Thou however
Mayst be secure, that all who here are present,
Will share one fate, and that the same as thine.
Already is it spread among the people,
That this is king Cresfonte's son ; now whether
Ancient affection, or stupidity,
And blind forgetfulness, can most affect them
We soon shall see ; howe'er in all events
Against the tyrant's followers, our king
(For he shall be our king) shall in our breasts
Have arms, defence, and shield.

Eg. Let fear be banish'd,
If you my friends are with me, I despise
Both arms and fury.

SCENE LAST.

Ismena to them.

Ism. O why stays the queen?
What waits she for?

Mer. What tidings dost thou bring?

Ism. Here in the outer court——the shouts and cries
West

Dost thou not hear? o fly and lead thy son—

Eg. Stay thee, o mother. I myself will go.

Ism. All the great court is full; a crowd immense,

Men, women, all require the mighty hero;

Who slew the cruel tyrant, every one

Would see the new-made king. Some talk about

His father, others, they describe the son ;

Of this affair some ask, and some relate

An hundred different ways. But *Let him live*

Cleaves all the air ; even the little children

Chearfully clap their hands : the sight has power,

Has power believe it to force tears of joy.

Mer. O prais'd be thou, o thou who govern'st all

And all dispos'st, Let us go my son.

Already art thou king : and I too happy ;

This moment let us go, whilst in their hearts

Burns such a pleasing, such a blest desire.

Eg. Believe the friends, that to acquire a kingdom

Is much less to me, than so dear a mother.

Pol. Jove when thou please'st now conclude my days,

I've liv'd to see the end of all my wishes,

And I desire no more.

Eg. To this old man,

O queen, I cannot render what I owe,

Permit me that I always as a father

Continue to esteem him.

Mer. I than thee

Am more his debtor, much it pleases me

To see thou art grateful, and this act thy first

From thoughts fit for a king that virtue governs.

4. AP. 134
The END.

E. R. R. M. T. A.

Page 23, Line 17, for, Was I urg'd by greediness, r. Was I urg'd
to by greediness ; p. 105. f. cereainly, r. certainly ; p. 125.
I. last but one, f. She like a tygress rag'd, plac'd herself, r. She
like a tygress rag'd, she plac'd herself.

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Sh